Idaho Press Club

Best of 2019

Reed Hollinshead – Idaho Transportation Department

Opinion Pieces

- Graveyard Spiral
- Blood in the Water
- Switchbacks

Idaho Transportation Department

THE TRANSPORTER

Your Safety • Your Mobility • Your Economic Opportunity

Graveyard Spiral

From the desk of Transporter Editor Reed Hollinshead:

In most situations, the threat is external. But in a "Graveyard Spiral" the threat is internal — you can't trust the message you are giving yourself. The wound is self-inflicted.

Aviators flying at night run this risk. Because they can no longer see the horizon line and adjust the plane's position based on that visual cue, their brain sends error-filled messages that generate actions that produce this death spiral.

The pilot mistakenly thinks their wings are level, but in reality they are banked right or left. The plane banks and then begins a descent, but the pilot thinks is a wings-level descent, and they pull back on the yoke, which tightens the spiral they are already in. As they descend faster and faster, they pull yarder on the yoke, which only further tightens the spiral and hastens the impact with the ground.

Sometimes we can be our own worst enemy.

When I was in my late teens, I hopped on a motorcycle that was way too powerful for me. When it started to accelerate too rapidly to control, my impulse was to twist my wrists back toward me and tighten my grip — totally counterproductive.

If you jump in a vehicle and choose to speed, then get caught, and argue with the cop about your speeding, you've triggered a self-inflicted wound twice in one trip!

If you habitually overspend and refuse to adhere to even the notion of a budget, the resulting money problems are a self-inflicted wound.

They are everywhere in life — opportunities to make it worse by our own actions.

Similarly, when finding or articulating our own unique value, our inner dialogue or impulse can get in the way. Many of us had modesty and humility drilled into us from an early age, so it feels foreign to contemplate our value, much less put a voice to it. But we all have it.

We all have something unique to offer — the difficult part is to identify what that is and realize that your unique gifts can be especially valuable by filling the void where someone else's gifting leaves a gap. In fact, it often takes the accumulation of the giftings of several diverse people to adequately fill that gap. But you can be one of the pieces.

The first step is to identify *your* unique value. You may have physical skills, or you may have limited skills and abilities in the physical realm. But you may instead have other skills you can bring to the table — your brain could be an asset. Or boldness. Or courage. Or compassion.

The grass may seem greener on the other side of the fence, but it is greener where it gets watered the most. When gifts are cultivated.

Dwight Bower, ITD's director for most of the '90s, used to warn against grabbing the arrow from out of the air as it passes by and plunging it into your own heart. There are enough slings and arrows sent at you each day. No need to add to the onslaught yourself.

The Graveyard Spiral, like any wound, is not inevitable — by the very definition of "self-inflicted," you hold the power to avoid it. Rather than working against yourself, spend that time cultivating your unique value. Then be willing to share it.

Published 07-05-19

Idaho Transportation Department

THE TRANSPORTER

Your Safety • Your Mobility • Your Economic Opportunity

Blood in the Water

OpEd from the desk of Transporter Editor Reed Hollinshead.

Blood in the Water has a very specific meaning — the emergence of predators and predator practices when blood is spilled. The Killer Instinct is celebrated in a sports context, but aside from a very narrow set of circumstances, that hyper-aggressive mentality really doesn't serve us.

Sensing *Blood in the Water* usually brings with it a feeling of impending victory when weakness or vulnerability is exposed. But that could be horribly misleading.

Remember, the fighter in the most trouble is the one who thinks he's winning and doesn't need to be careful anymore, and the one who believes he'll get the victory without putting in the work. The most dangerous fighter is often not the seasoned vet who makes the same practiced moves, but the unknown who is unpredictable. They'll make the move you never saw coming.

Certainly there are times when an "attack-and-subdue" reaction is warranted – often in sports that is the only way to get the upper hand. And in a combative situation where a negative outcome could be disastrous for you or your family, an aggressive attack may be the only real option.

But most of the time, fortunately, that response is not needed.

Restraint is often the best course of action. The idea of leadership is closely associated with concepts like power and authority. Yet, true leadership is often demonstrated by NOT using power when it is within your right to do so, and the opportunity stands right before you. If you had the freedom to act in an aggressive way and did not, you are usually better for it.

True leadership is about developing individuals and building community — concepts that do not mesh with the *Blood in the Water* scenario.

It's about moral authority. The Golden Rule our parents taught all of us – *Do unto others as you would have it done to you* – cannot coexist with a *Blood in the Water* philosophy.

Our reaction could help lay the foundation for how others act, and it may provide the teachable moment we've heard about. If there's something wrong, those with the ability to take action have the responsibility to do so.

Don't focus on your own feet and get tunnel vision about your own path. Look up now and then and see what is happening around you, and who needs help.

Outside of sports, most predatory things are reviled – predatory lending, sexual predators, etc. When we sense blood in the water, our first instinct should not be to attack and destroy, but to realize that we need to help a person in distress.

Published 10-04-19

Idaho Transportation Department

THE TRANSPORTER

Your Safety • Your Mobility • Your Economic Opportunity

Switchbacks

OpEd from the desk of Transporter Editor Reed Hollinshead.

The shortest route between Point A and Point B is a straight line – we all learned that in math class way back when, hopefully. But what happens when a straight line is not advisable, or even possible? We create switchbacks.

The switchback is a sudden change, a radical shift in direction. It may not be the quickest or shortest route, but it is usually the best one. Switchbacks are often used by those blazing trails where none existed before. A road or path up a mountainside or in rough terrain will almost surely be filled with switchbacks. Going straight up the mountain may seem like the most direct approach, but it is usually not advisable. Confronted with that much adversity, most will seek another way. The Path of Least Resistance.

Some live for the challenge of the direct route. Some embrace the ease of the established route. The working world is filled with both. And there's validity in both approaches. At different times -- especially given workloads -- both have appeal.

That should give new meaning to the phrase, "Let's get on the same page." It generally means we need to meet or talk about it so we all know which way we are going and how we'll get there. That doesn't necessarily mean that we are in perfect alignment – we likely will take different paths to get there, and will have different things in our toolkits when we arrive.

You need a visionary thinker who sees things as they could be rather than as they are today. You need a strategic thinker to come up with the gameplan in order to deliver the product to the right people at the right time. But you need more than just the thinkers. You need a builder, who is focused on relationships and can build a strong coalition of support. That person usually makes the team greater than the sum of its parts. That person may be the woo-hoo type of individual, the cheerleader who can build a broad network. Just as important as the inch-deep and mile-wide approach is the one willing to go a mile deep to build strong interpersonal bonds. Think social velcro.

You need an activator or doer who takes the bull by the horns and gets things done. They may be seen as abrasive by some because of what is perceived as a single-minded focus on results. This may manifest as relational teflon. You need someone to influence and steer the conversation, but also someone to execute the vision. On rare occasions it may be the same person, but those two disparate qualities usually don't exist in the same body. And you need a learner, someone who is committed to continuous improvement and is best taking an objective look at it, so that we learn from mistakes and improve processes, knowing that we'll likely be repeating the process in the future.

We all bring different qualities to the table. Not better or worse, necessarily. Just different. We likely all took different paths.

Some may go straight up the mountain. Some will follow the path in front of them, which may include switchbacks. One way is not inherently better than the other. The switchbacks were put there for a reason. They may be preferred; even necessary.

Being "on the same page" does not have to mean we have to be in lock-step. Same destination, but different steps to get there. We each carry a different quality on the trip – Learner, Catalyst, Motivator, Visionary, Strategic Thinker, Builder, Doer — different, but uniquely valuable. A people and a path - likely filled with switchbacks.

Published 08-23-19